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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (SUBJECT LINE)

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SUBJECT: IECI COMMISSIONER COMMENTS ON LESSONS LEARNED FOR
THE PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS AND THE COMMISSION'S FUTURE

REF: 05 BAGHDAD 5154

BAGHDAD 00000852 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert S. Ford for
reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Acting Chair of the Independent
Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI) Hamdia Al-Hussaini,
met with PolOff 9 March to discuss recommendations from
the IMIE-sponsored after action conference in Madrid and
the future of the IECI. Recommendations from the Madrid
conference include items for consideration in a future
election law, ideas on how to improve IECI performance,
and voting process changes. Hamdia also expressed
concern that political parties will directly appoint
future Commissioners, eliminating the independence of any
future election commission. Hamdia became acting chair
after Chairman Izadin Al-Mohamady, stepped down in
February. END SUMMARY.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE MADRID CONFERENCE

12. (C) On 9 March, PolOff met with IECI Acting Chair
Hamdia Al-Hussaini to discuss her attendance
at a post-election conference in Madrid. The 27-29
February conference was sponsored by the International
Mission for Iraqi Elections (IMIE) and was the second of
three major after action events attended by IECI
Commissioners to discuss lessons learned from December's
Council of Representative elections. IMIE, an
independent and international elections monitoring group,
played a key role during the December elections (reftel).
Commissioner Hamdia said that the conference was very
productive and the IECI was praised for the overall
success of the elections under difficult circumstances.

13. (C) Hamdia said the focal point of the conference was
on lessons learned from the election. These lessons
included specific items which should be addressed in the
anticipated election law, the management of elections,
and internal IECI procedures and staffing.

1A. Election Laws Changes. There was wide agreement
by conference attendees that the new election law should
include provisions to punish political parties or
individual candidates who violated the law or IECI
regulations during the campaign. During the December
election there were clear violations observed, but no way
to sanction the violators. Many, but not all, of the
participants also felt that the law should be written so
that it would allow selected re-balloting in areas where

high fraud rates were determined to exist. Hamdia said that the attendees agreed that out-of-country voting rules did not provide fair representation for Iraqis living overseas.

1B. IECI Improvements. The conference participants cited IECI staffing shortfalls as a significant problem, specifically, the lack of adequate legal staff to review and handle complaints. The IECI was also criticized for relying too heavily on television and the print media. Hamdia said that conference attendees felt the IECI commissioners should have had more direct contact with the electorate and better interaction with the political parties.

1C. Process Improvements. Finally, Hamdia told PolOff there was general agreement among conference participants that the way the voter registration lists were distributed was problematic in that the same list went to multiple polling centers. This allowed a person to show up at different centers and vote without the ability to cross check to see if they had already voted somewhere else. (Comment: the presence of ink on the tip of voters' index fingers would presumably have prevented this, but Hamdia was adamant this was a problem.) To prevent this, she said, future registration lists must be specific to each polling station. It was also suggested by IMIE recommended that during future elections political party representatives be given copies of the tally sheets after the count at each center. This was opposed by the IECI Commissioners, who pointed out that most of the polling centers did not have copy machines and any tally sheets given out could be modified by the political parties to create mischief or claim fraud.

COMMENTS ON THE DELAYED SEATING OF GOVERNMENT

BAGHDAD 00000852 002.2 OF 002

14. (C) Commissioner Hamdia said she was frustrated with the political infighting and delay in the seating of parliament. She said that the constitution and will of the people were not being respected and that people were fed up with political parties and politicians who were only out for their own interests. She also stated her belief that the delays in seating the government only work to the insurgency's advantage and that the longer the delay, the worse the security situation seems to become.

THE FUTURE OF THE IECI

15. (C) According to Hamdia, Shia Coalition leader Hussein al-Shahrastani met with the IECI Commissioners several weeks ago to address the Commissioners concerns about the future of the IECI. During that meeting Shahrastani told the IECI Commissioners that an election law was drafted but postponed to the new parliament for action, where he promised it would be one of the first items of legislation brought up for discussion.

16. (C) When asked her own views on the future of the IECI, Commissioner Hamdia, said that she would like to continue as an Election Commissioner, and hoped that an extension of the current IECI would be enacted before their mandate expires on May 15. She said she was fearful that if this was not the case, when a new commission was finally established the commissioners would be appointed by the various political parties and the Commission would lose its independence.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) Comment: Hamdia's expressions of concern over politicization of the Commission are notable given her own Shia Islamist links. Her sentiments also echo a statement to PolOffs on March 8 by former IECI Chairman Izadin Al-Mohammady. Mohammady told PolOffs that when the IECI formally delivered the election results to President Talabani, Talabani noted that his preference would be to have a commission whose members were chosen by political parties. With the conclusion of the Madrid conference, the IECI Commissioners are now preparing for their final after-action conference, an April 5-7 UN-sponsored off-site in Cyprus. Barring the quick passage of an election law allowing for either an extension of or the continuation of the IECI, this conference, and the final report written afterwards, will conclude the IECI's work in its present form.

KHALILZAD